Warning Signs

When a Child Is at Risk for Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

What Are the Red Flags that Indicate a Child May Be Exploited?

- Chronic truant / runaway / homeless youth
- Excess cash
- Hotel room keys
- Multiple cell phones
- Signs of branding (tattoos, jewelry)
- Having expensive items with no known source of income (especially hair, manicures, cell phone, clothes)
- Lying about age / false identification/inconsistencies in information being reported
- Dramatic personality change; evasive behavior especially around a “new boyfriend.” talk about being “taken care of,” disengagement from school, sports, community
- Lack of knowledge of a given community or whereabouts
- Provocative clothing, sex toys, multiple condoms, lube or other sexual devices

What Are the Guiding Principles for Engaging with a Child Who May Be Exploited?

- Maintain a compassionate and non-judgmental attitude at all times.
- Be consistent: follow through on everything and do not make promises that cannot be kept.
- Trust and relationship-building: this is a slow process and relationship testing is to be expected.
- Cultural Competency: be sensitive to the unique cultural needs and experiences of each person. Be aware of your own beliefs, biases, and cultural worldview.
- Safety: focus on safe housing, harm reduction and creating safety strategies for youth.
- Self-determination and empowerment: youth should have information relevant to their situation and be encouraged to make informed decisions whenever possible.

What Questions Do I Ask?

- What kind of support do you need?
- What happened to you?
- Sometimes people trade sex for money or because they have to survive, has that happened to you?
- I’m concerned about your safety, are there places that are dangerous for you to go? Are there people that are dangerous for you to be around right now?
- I’m concerned you are in the life. I will not judge you or anything you tell me. I’m here to listen if you ever want to talk or want support getting out.

How Do I Identify At-Risk Youth?

- Ask specific questions to screen for risk factors or CSE involvement
- Increase attempts to find youth who chronically run away or are truant
- Learn about specific gang activity from local law enforcement (or from youth if it is safe for them to discuss)
- Ask about STI/STDs, pregnancy, and unexplained injuries
- Observe communication patterns; who talks to whom, who doesn’t talk, who is in control

How Do I Help?

Call the CSEC Hotline @ 1 (855) 400 - CSEC / 1 (855) 400 - 2732 or Email CommunityAdvocate@YouthCare.org